

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 122 265

CS 002 637

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TITLE Language Difference and Reading.
PUB DATE 76
NOTE 24p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association (21st, Anaheim, California, May 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.83 HC-\$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *American Indians; *Bilingual Schools; *Cultural Differences; Cultural Education; Cultural Pluralism; Educational Alternatives; Elementary Secondary Education; Ethnocentrism; Language Standardization; Multilingualism; *Nonstandard Dialects; Reading Instruction; *Standard Spoken Usage

ABSTRACT

Linguacentrism, or language-centeredness in the public schools, works to the disadvantage of all non-standard speakers, but especially Indian children. Compensatory education models direct attention away from the school system itself, and place blame on the assumed "deficits" of the non-standard speaker. An examination of Navajo children's learning habits reveals not only a language difference, but a significant variation in learning style. The recognition of these culturally determined learning styles is essential for educators. For bilingual schools, the maintenance model, which provides instruction in both languages throughout the educational process, is more satisfactory than the transition model, which seeks to phase the non-standard speaker into the English-speaking system. Multilingual/multicultural schools encourage reading development by utilizing familiar cultural goals, values, and settings. In the case of cultures with a limited written tradition, the oral tradition can be encouraged and literacy in the original language can take precedence over mastery of the school's language. (KS)

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LANGUAGE DIFFERENCE AND READING

I am not sure what any of you may have expected in a brief discussion of language differences and reading and in order to give some direction to the remarks I might make to provoke our discussion, I have chosen to introduce the topic by quoting a paragraph from the most recent issue of The Indian Historian:¹

It is seriously doubted that any examination of the American Indian, regardless of what aspect is chosen, can ignore the cataclysmic treatment the native host received from his foreign visitors. A quotation from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1897 best combines this treatment and the subject of language:

"Instruction of Indians in the vernacular is not only of no use to them but is detrimental to the cause of education and civilization and will not be permitted in any Indian School. It is believed that if any Indian vernacular is

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allowed to be taught on Indian reservations it will prejudice the pupil as well as his parents against the English language. This language which is good enough for a white man or a black man ought to be good enough for the red man."

If we subtract 1897 from 1965, we can determine quickly that there were yet sixty-eight years to pass before the passage of the civil rights act and with the civil rights act, direct moves that would change this kind of directive with mandated positive action. Of course, during these sixty-eight years, we continued to perpetuate prejudicial attitudes and many teachers did exhibit lingua-centric attitudes toward so-called standard English which devalued everyone else's native language. This is referred to in Downing's recent excellent book COMPARATIVE READING.

Just as there is ethnocentrism, so is there a problem of linguacentrism--language-centeredness. Teachers and educational systems have often just assumed that everyone speaks the standard dialect. Because of this, it has been, and still is, common for children to be classified as mentally retarded when they fail intelligence tests given in a language they don't know; to sit through the year in a classroom where the teacher ignores the fact that the entire class speaks a language he doesn't; to be treated as stupid because their dialect differs from that standard of language aimed at by the teacher. If there were less ignorance of, and less insensitivity toward, language differences there might be a more tolerant climate in which less

negative emotional response would build up. All too often teachers regard their standard of English as the only correct version of the language and treat the variations as inferior and careless. Parenthetically, I might add, they do not even stop to think that there are several versions of standard English in our country.²

The young children in school, then are the product of whatever set of cultural forces that has taught them to think, react, value, believe, or act in certain modes. Learning styles must surely be considered and I will return to them later.

When it was decided at the federal level to fund programs to help students who were seriously underachieving in our schools, a vocabulary of special terms was used: the disadvantaged, the culturally deprived, the language handicapped, and the need for compensatory education. All of these words have negative connotations, making the child the deficit in the system instead of the school curriculum. We are all already familiar with the way in which children are apt to meet, but not surpass, the teacher's expectation. We are all familiar with the truism that we will start with what the children bring to school and build from there. So, if all the children bring four years of speaking fluent Navajo, for example, and one teacher comes without one word of that language in her vocabulary, one should ask who is deprived, handicapped, or needs to compensate? I agree with Basil Bernstein when he wrote:³

The concept of compensatory education serves to direct attention away from the internal organization and the educational context of the school, and focuses it instead upon the families and

children. It also implies that something is lacking in the family, and so in the child. As a result the children are unable to benefit from school. It follows that the school has to "compensate" for the something which is missing in the family, and the children become little deficit systems. If only the parents were interested in the goodies we offer; if only they were like middle class parents, then we could do our job.

This erases the assertions of Bereiter and Engelmann ten years ago that such children had no language or concepts when they came to school.⁴

All educators should be aware in 1976 that all of these children, by the time they are six years old, bring to school a complete, systematic language system that provides well for all of their communication needs. Teachers must be prepared to take advantage of that six years of language and experience and use it constructively.

The U. S. Commission on Civil Rights states:⁵

. . . nearly 16 percent of the [American] population speak a language other than English as a native tongue. Spanish, German, and Italian speakers are the most numerous, in that order. Spanish is the only one of the three which has experienced substantial growth in the number of speakers since 1940, largely owing to increased immigration from Latin America.

In *Lau v. Nichols*, the United States Supreme Court declared in 1970 that under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, ". . . all school

districts are compelled to provide children who speak little or no English with special language programs which will give them an equal opportunity to an education." "Los Angeles City Schools have produced their own multilingual handbooks . . . these books are available in Cantonese Chinese, Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Pilipino and Spanish (Lawrence, 1975)."⁶

The timing of when a child, taught in a bilingual bicultural program, can be moved to ESL is determined by variables, one of the most important being the amount of his exposure to English outside of the classroom. Does he hear it spoken and used at home? At play? On the radio or TV? The most successful second language learning takes place when the learner feels that he is gaining something for himself rather than giving up something of himself.

The preparation of material locally is a very difficult and extensive undertaking. For example, ROCAP (Regional Offices for Central America and Panama) spent seven or eight years in the 1960's under AID funding getting textbook planning done, scope and sequences made, and manuscripts for series of books done in reading, arithmetic, language, social studies and science. And the Latin American Programs in Education at the University of New Mexico has held ongoing contracts with the Ministry of Education in Quito, Ecuador, from 1966 to 1976 to complete textbook series in reading, mathematics, and science and to provide some in-service workshops for principals, supervisors, normal school teachers and classroom teachers. In an intensive effort, Dr. Dolores Gonzales, at the University of New Mexico, under contracts with the United States Office of Education, from 1970-1975, conducted institutes

in the education of specialists in preparation of teaching materials in Spanish and over three years developed a reading program in that language that includes readiness materials and readers at six levels.

At a much more difficult level, Dr. Bernard Spolsky at the University of New Mexico has directed a Navajo Reading Study since 1967 that has produced a large number of very elementary paper back books written by Navajos that could provide reading materials for introducing children to reading and providing some practice through the Navajo language. This is a continuing effort and the Navajo educators are working toward increased production of materials for teaching in Navajo.

These efforts are only isolated examples of such materials production attempts and do suggest that the educational enterprise is now viewing the bilingual child as an asset rather than as a liability. Knowing two languages can be valued as a distinct advantage--the person who possesses it has two views of the world.

Perhaps it is accurate to say that our country is discovering values in cultural pluralism. And in 1976, competent bilingual teachers are almost sure to find that their prospects for getting jobs are much better than those of many other kinds of teachers.

Elkind concludes that there are at least four requirements for successful beginning reading:

- 1) a language-rich environment;
- 2) attachment to adults who model and reward reading behavior;
- 3) attainment of concrete operations in the child's growth and development; and

4) an instructional program.

All other things being equal, Elkind continues, the presence of these four characteristics should ensure that most children will learn to read with reasonable ease and considerable enjoyment.⁷

Using these four requirements as universals in a child's acquisition of reading skill, how must they be adapted across cultures, in other languages than English, or in a multilingual situation? This leads us then to look at just a few factors about children learning to read in the school situation.

1) Are there different learning styles by which children in different ethnic groups best acquire the basic skills they need?

In other words, do we need different approaches to learning?

2) What kind of a bilingual school do we want or in what way do we accommodate for the child's language?

3) What are the alternatives open to school administrators in program planning? How multilingual-multicultural can a school environment become?

First, a few observations about learning styles:

Vera John contrasts the learning style of the Navajo child at the Rough Rock Demonstration School with that of the urban middle-class child in this way: The urban middle-class child is expected to display his growing skills through language, while the Navajo child is a doer.⁸

There is considerable agreement on the part of social scientists, educators, and others that the Indian children of the Southwest are visual in their approaches to their world. Navajo children . . . avidly absorb the world by sight

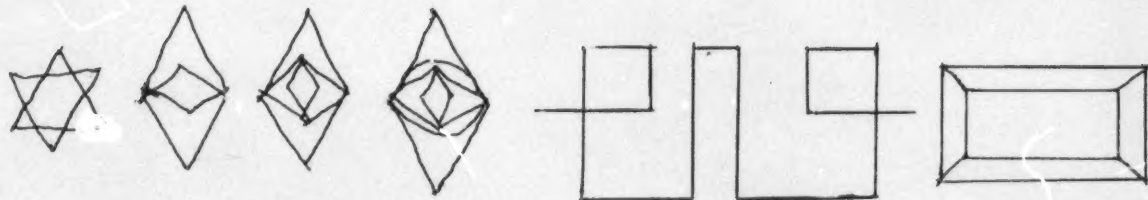
and touch. . . . Older children assume responsibility for younger children, without bossiness, the young Indians use gestures and touch, seldom words. . . . Though attentive to the teacher's voice, these children tend to watch her actions.

John continues:⁹

Language lessons are introduced as the most valued aspect of education, but they are presented in ways that contradict aspects of Navajo children's preschool life. The shape and cold feel of the buildings in which they live and are taught deprive them of sensory impressions they are used to: the look of the sky, the feel of the wind, the smell of the smoke. The little children cluster around each other, touching their buddies' hair and arms or holding hands even during lessons. This is one of the ways in which they keep literally in touch with the familiar.

Bland¹⁰ used the Visual Recall Ability Indicator test to measure the difference in visual motor memory between Indian and Caucasian children. When 3,344 Hopi, Navajo, and Jicarilla Apache Indian children ages 8 to 16 were compared with 797 Caucasian children of like ages in their ability to reproduce the eleven drawings of the Visual Recall Ability Indicator, the Indian students' performance was consistently superior. The Visual Recall Ability Indicator consists of eleven geometric figures presented in order of increasing difficulty. The examiner draws the figure on the board, leaves each figure in view for ten seconds, and then erases it. Subjects reproduce the drawings on their paper.

Scorable items:



Score 1 1 1 2 3 1

Just as the Bender Visual Motor Gestalt test measured visual perception and hand-eye coordination, this test was designed to measure visual recall paired with visual perception. The differences in the performances of the Indian students and the Caucasian students was statistically significant beyond the one percent level.

Susan Phillips observed the classroom management practices of the teachers in the elementary school in the Warm Springs Indian Reservation in central Oregon. Phillips had learned that Indians show a great deal of reluctance to talk in class and that they participate less and less as they go through school. She was aware of the cultural contexts that determine when speaking is socially appropriate. Knowing that Indian children are not culturally oriented to the ways in which classroom learning generally takes place, Phillips worked out four different participant structures--ways of arranging verbal interaction with student and teacher--with the teachers at Warm Springs. The first type was one in which the teacher, in front of the class, tried to interact with all the students. The teacher determines when there

will be verbal interaction, whether it will be voluntary or compulsory and whether he interacts with one child, a few, or all. The second type was one in which the teacher interacted with only some of the students, as in reading groups. Response to the teacher in this group was usually individual and mandatory. Those not in the group worked alone or independently at their desks. The third type of participant structure consisted of all students working independently at their desks, but with the teacher explicitly available for student-initiated verbal interaction. The interaction between student and teacher is not witnessed by the other students in that they do not hear what is said. The fourth participant structure was one in which the students were divided into small groups that they ran themselves, though always with the more distant supervision of the teacher immediately available. In the first two types of group management, the Indian children showed considerable reluctance to participate. Phillips reaffirmed the belief that when Indian children do speak, they speak very softly, often in tones inaudible to a person more than a few feet away, and in utterances typically shorter or briefer than those of their non-Indian counterparts. Group three was not only the most successful participant structure, but Phillips found that sixth grade Indian students in the third group initiated private encounters with the teacher, after only a few weeks, much more frequently than non-Indian students did. One sixth grade teacher explained, "I spend as little time as possible in front of the class."¹¹

Kleinfeld, at the University of Alaska, has studied characteristics of successful boarding home parents of Eskimo, Aleut, and

Athabascan Indian students and the teacher-counselor successful characteristics. She has found that the Native Americans do not find it easy to leave their distant villages and live in middle-class Anglo homes in Anchorage, Fairbanks, or Juneau. She defined the affective dimension in terms of communicated or demonstrated warmth and evaluated perceived demandingness on a scale from low to high. The successful adults were those who effected a behavior typology of high warmth with moderately high demandingness. As second choice, high warmth-low demandingness worked better than low warmth with either high or low demandingness.¹²

The reports here of the observations made by John about the Navajo children; by Phillips about the Warm Springs children; by Bland testing visual motor memory; and by Kleinfeld about the effective need for a warm relationship for the Alaska natives with the non-natives are only a small first step in the search for tangible evidence that there are learning style variants that we need to find and measure before we can successfully educate the various minority children in our public schools.

It seems to me that educators should be interested in all of these efforts to find out to what kind of stimuli different students will best respond--whether across cultures or within cultures. One of my concerns would be whether or not there are greater ranges of differences within a given culture than there are across cultures.

If adequate educational strategies in keeping with Indian children's cognitive strengths and learning styles are developed and applied within context of a culturally relevant curriculum, it seems

reasonable to expect substantial increase in Indian children's achievement levels.

There are two general types of bilingual schools: the transition model and the maintenance model.

I. The transition model.--One type of bilingual program in elementary schools is meant to be a "bridge" for the non-English-speaking child to learn English so that he can then complete the usual course of study in English. He is taught concepts and continues learning in his vernacular only while he is being taught English. This represents preparation to transfer from his native tongue to English and then, as far as the school is concerned, disregard his vernacular. It has often been called a compensatory program since he is not yet ready to function in the standard middle-class school. Personally, I find such a program inadequate unless some provision is made for continued reinforcement of the native language at least for some part of the school day. The danger is that the inflexible, middle-class oriented school is really only extending one more enticement to the family to get the child into the educational system that can eventually eliminate his language and culture instead of permitting him to retain a biculturalism that he may well prefer.

II. The maintenance model.--The other type of bilingual program demands instruction in two media throughout the school program because its proponents believe that a bilingual/multicultural course of study is inherently a good thing. It is geared to teach the new generation that there is inherent value in understanding and preserving a diverse

national heritage. In such a program, Spanish-speaking students, for example, might finish the elementary school completely literate in both languages. In such bilingual programs as Navajo-English, with limited written literature, the extension of the use of the oral language, in keeping with his oral tradition, could continue throughout the child's school life.

Transition models have evolved most often as "deficit models"--the child is deficient in language and as soon as it is learned, he will then ultimately be integrated in the great melting pot and the school will try to succeed in making him conform to the universal monocultural standard.

Maintenance models that are extended all the way through school place value on language fluency in more than one language, maintenance of cultural values, knowledge of one's cultural heritage, and has as its goal cultural pluralism--equal acceptance of diverse groups.

In the elementary schools, maintenance models have operated with competent bilingual teachers teaching approximately half days in the national language and about half a day in the child's vernacular. Or, they have utilized one English language teacher half days in two classrooms who alternates with a Spanish language teacher in the same two classrooms. There have also been itinerant second-language teachers who teach shorter periods of time in elementary classrooms. Teaching the second language one period a day as a school subject does not constitute a bilingual program.

Of course, bilingual/multicultural schools will not flourish in our communities if the community itself does not value them. In

those communities where a small enclave of different-language speakers are still banded together, they may continue to use only the vernacular in the home and in the neighborhood, expecting the school to prepare the children for the world outside. As long as they feel that their children do know the mother tongue they may express little concern about what does go on in school. The problem here is still common in small Northern New Mexico communities where the mother tongue is used in the domains of home, religion, and neighborhood equally as much as English, but at school, English has, of course, dominated. While still in 1975 there is sufficient mastery of both languages to make a two-language school really function, the problems in language shift as the young people finish high school and go away from home to work or study for indefinite periods of time, they will, as our society is presently structured, be won over to becoming English-dominant in language usage. And since the language of the state is generally English, they will subtly begin to diminish the values of their cultural heritage that their grandfathers and fathers hoped and expected to perpetuate.

Margaret Hubbard has pointed out that the beginning reader needs far more cues to meaning than the mature reader. He can't go directly from visual features to meaning but needs mediators, and word-labeling. The best identified kind of help he needs is hearing the concept or idea he is reading--the beginning reader goes from feature identification to word identification to hearing the word to meaning or making sure what he reads makes sense. If the beginner has an abundant vocabulary, hearing what he expected to hear becomes effective very quickly. It enables him to understand in reading all that he knows in his oral repertoire.¹³

One-to-one phoneme-grapheme correspondence makes sound mediation very efficient ^{as in} such languages as Finnish, Korean, or Spanish, according to Downing (1973).¹⁴ However, with all the irregularities of English, this mediator is less effective. Hence, the average six-year-old cannot make use of the redundancy in language because of his inexperience and immature cognitive development and he must learn the lexical regularities of the written language--so that even with the ability to mediate word meanings with sound, his reading is inefficient in the beginning.

Whatever his mediating techniques, they are only crutches to get him through the stage of storing many words in his long-term memory so that he can go directly from words or phrases directly to meaning as a thinking process. It is worth adding here that teaching a great deal of phonics or other analytical aids are only part of this beginning crutch, should be kept at a minimum, and discarded as soon as the mature reader can go directly to meaning.

In cultures where there is no written form of the first language, mastery of listening and speaking skills in the second language must be achieved through skilled, sequenced second language instruction. Literacy instruction (reading and writing the second language) does not begin until the child has acquired language competence in oral usage.

At one time, Venezky¹⁵ suggested that children whose dialects deviate markedly from standard English should be taught the standard brand before they are taught reading. He underscored the explicit

assumption that the standard language was a second dialect and not a more correct one that was being taught. Others have objected to this suggestion because subcultures are not often highly motivated to learn the standard dialect. Those of us who have observed students pass through all twelve grades of public school and graduate with very little change in their use of the language would attest to the impracticality of this suggestion. Goodman's suggestion that the child may look at the written form of standard English and read it in his own dialect with understanding is much more acceptable.

There are only a few alternatives open to the school systems that are sincerely concerned about conforming to the new regulations pertaining to each individual's civil rights.

1. First, whenever a child enters school speaking a language or a dialect other than that of the school, competent personnel must be found who can speak to him in his language, to initiate learning experiences in his language, and provide for the extension of his intelligence. Preferably with certified teachers, this child can continue through the primary grades extending both cognitive and affective growth while he receives instruction in the use of the language of the school as a second language. If he speaks another language that has a written form, he can become biliterate in his language and the language of the school by the end of his elementary school years.

A child's use of his native language when he is learning to read is a very important factor in his success, for success in reading in any language is determined to a great extent by the student's

attitude toward what he is trying to do. If he hears, speaks, and feels what is already known to him, he is more comfortable than if he is bombarded by strange sounds and sights. Once he feels at ease, or successful, in reading his own language, he is more receptive to acquiring another language and the culture it represents.

2. Second, if the language of the child is not in written form--there are no reading materials in that language--he can continue to grow in the cognitive and affective areas of learning by using the language entirely in the oral tradition. Preferably with certified teachers who know his language; otherwise, with adults who are concerned and know his language and culture. His literacy will be restricted to the language of the school and will not begin until he has genuine competence in oral language skills in the new language.

3. There is a third alternative when there are limited reading materials in the second language. He may be able to read his own language first and then after he has assimilated the process and the values that accrue from it, he can become literate in the language of the school. Modiano study provides tangible evidence that such a plan, even though very limited, works.

No discussion is included here of Downing's concern for the mismatch between phoneme-grapheme aspects of the language. His recommendations for changing the complex irregular writing system to a simplified regularized writing system, such as was done with i.t.a. has had little appeal in this country. He reports that the i.t.a. Foundation in England found it very difficult to persuade teachers to

change their teaching medium. It appears likely that teachers in the United States would be no more likely to change.¹⁶

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p. 18a

In her essay in Language and Learning to Read, Constance McCullough¹⁷ illustrates the complexity of the reading process in a very meaningful and comprehensive way in the twenty-four statements she ~~illustrates~~ based on a two-sentence paragraph a child might read:

This bright blue marble that we call the earth is the third planet from the sun, a small star from the center of a galaxy which is 50,000 light years across. A hundred billion other stars make up this system and there are untold numbers of such groupings. (p. 204)

McCullough identifies sensory impressions, cognitive relationships and products, context determines meaning, multiple interpretations of context, qualifying with modifiers, sentence syntax, synonyms, figurative speech, punctuation, redundancy, omission of expected elements in sentences, positions and numbers of modifiers--all of these as facets of learning to cope with language. This clearly calls for a wide range of mental gymnastics in order to read passages meaningfully. In a summary sentence, as a directive to teachers, McCullough writes:¹⁸

Teachers should study the signals to meaning from the point of view of a reader who does not know all that an author knows about his subject, or know what a teacher knows about interpreting signals. (p. 214)

Shuy has outlined a basic core of courses which he feels would give the undergraduate elementary education major a basic foundation in language study as a basis for teaching reading in the elementary schools:

- 1) The Nature of Language. Language attitudes, phonetics, grammar, the systematic nature of language.
- 2) Language variation. Regional dialects; social dialects; non-standard features of dialects; basic concepts of sociolinguistics; language shift; language interference.
- 3) Field work in the language of children. Gathering language data and analyzing its features.
- 4) Teaching Standard English: Oral language, Reading, and Composition. Some emphasis on writing materials for teaching reading; effect of dialect on the beginning reading experience.

In most teacher-training programs this would be a rather major overhaul. However, the significance of each reading teacher knowing something about the language he is attempting to teach does require such a change.

16a Roger Shuy, "Teachers' Attitudes Toward Black English," in De Stefano, Johanna S., editor, Language, Society and Education, (Worthington, Ohio: Charles A. Jones, 1973), p. 206.

As a conclusion, an illustration from Constance McCullough detailing the complexity of making reading an understandable process in the English language could be applied, I'm sure, also to Spanish, Navajo, Chinese or whatever second language you have encountered.

Clearly, this needs to be done by a teacher who has complete mastery of the syntax of the language the child is using. It further emphasizes the scope of the problem if we expect to have children received in school and permitted to proceed on the growing edge of learning in whatever their vernacular may be.

NOTES

¹ James Yost, "Traces of the Native Tongue," The Indian Historian, 9: 40, No. 1, Winter, 1976.

² John Downing, Comparative Reading: Cross-National Studies of Behavior and Processes in Reading and Writing (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1973), p. 186.

³ Basil B. Bernstein, "A Critique of the Concept of Compensatory Education," in Courtney Cazden, Vera John, and Dell Hymes, eds., Functions of Language in the Classroom (New York: Teachers College Press, 1972), p. 137.

⁴ Carl Bereiter and Seigfried Engelmann, Teaching Disadvantaged Children to Read (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966).

⁵ Laura Johnson, "Bilingual-bicultural Education: A Two-Way Street," The Reading Teacher, 29: 234, December, 1975, citing the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, A Better Chance to Learn: Bilingual-Bicultural Education, Clearing House Publication No. 51, Washington, D. C., May, 1975, p. 2.

⁶ Johnson, op. cit., pp. 235-36.

⁷ David Elkind, "We Can Teach Reading Better," Today's Education, 64:36, Nov.-Dec., 1975.

⁸ Vera John, "Styles of Learning--Styles of Teaching; Reflections on the Education of Navajo Children," in Courtney Cazden, Vera John, and Dell Hymes, eds., Functions of Language in the Classroom (New York: Teachers College Press, 1972), p. 334.

⁹ Ibid., p. 335.

¹⁰ Laurel Bland, "Visual Perception and Recall of School-Age Navajo, Hopi, Jicarilla Apache and Caucasian Children of the Southwest," unpublished doctoral dissertation, the Graduate School, University of New Mexico, 1974.

¹¹ Susan K. Phillips, "Participant Structures and Communicative Competence: Warm Springs Children in Community and Classroom" in Courtney Cazden, Vera John, and Dell Hymes, eds., Functions of Language in the Classroom (New York: Teachers College Press, 1972), pp. 370-82.

¹² J. S. Kleinfeld, "Effective Teachers of Indian and Eskimo High School Students," Fairbanks: University of Alaska, Institute of Social, Economic and Government Research, and Center for Northern Educational Research, 1972; and "Characteristics of Successful Boarding Home Parents of Eskimo and Athabascan Indian Students," Human Organization, 32:191-199, Summer, 1973.

¹³ Margaret Hubbard, "Learning to Process Visually Coded Symbolic Information," in Hodges and Rudorf, Language and Learning to Read (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972), pp. 118-26.

¹⁴ Downing, op. cit.

¹⁵ R. L. Venezky, "Nonstandard Language and Reading," Elementary English, 47:37-46 (1970).

¹⁶ Downing, op. cit., p. 367.

¹⁷ Constance M. McCullough, "What Should the Reading Teacher Know About Language and Thinking?" in Richard Hodges and Hugh Rudolf, Language and Learning to Read (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972), p. 204.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 214.